

CULTURE AND TRADITION IS MEDICINE

Presented by

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this presentation are those of the speaker and do not necessarily represent the views, policies, and positions of the Indian Health Service (IHS), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or American Indian Health and Family Services (AIHFS).

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify what trauma and historical trauma are
2. Understand how Native American cultures promote healing and resiliency
3. Learn best practices in working with Native American populations
4. See examples of communities blending western and traditional practices

HISTORICAL TRAUMA



“These events don’t just target an individual, they target a whole collective community...the trauma is held personally and can be transmitted over generations. Even family members who do not have a direct experience of the trauma itself can feel the effects generations later”

— Karina Walters, Ph.D.

WHAT IS HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences
- The term was originally used to describe the experience of children of Holocaust survivors and has since been used to describe the experience of colonized groups across the world and communities with a history of oppression, victimization, and massive group trauma exposure

THREE ELEMENTS OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- A trauma or wounding occurred
- The trauma is shared by a group of people rather than individually experienced
- The trauma spans multiple generations, such that contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing events

IMPACT OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- Health disparities, substance abuse, and mental illness are all commonly linked to experiences of historical trauma (Michaels, Rousseau, and Yang, 2010)
- “Historical Trauma Response” includes high levels of substance abuse, suicide, depression, anxiety, low self- esteem, anger, difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions and unresolved historical grief (Brave Heart, 1998)

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Occurs when responses to trauma are passed down from one generation to the next generation. The next generation can display the physical and psychological symptoms of the prior generation



1948 CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948

Article II: “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed”

A **mental element** – “with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:”

A **physical element** which includes the following 5 acts:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

“KILLING MEMEBRS OF THE GROUP”

Community massacres:

Wounded Knee, 1890

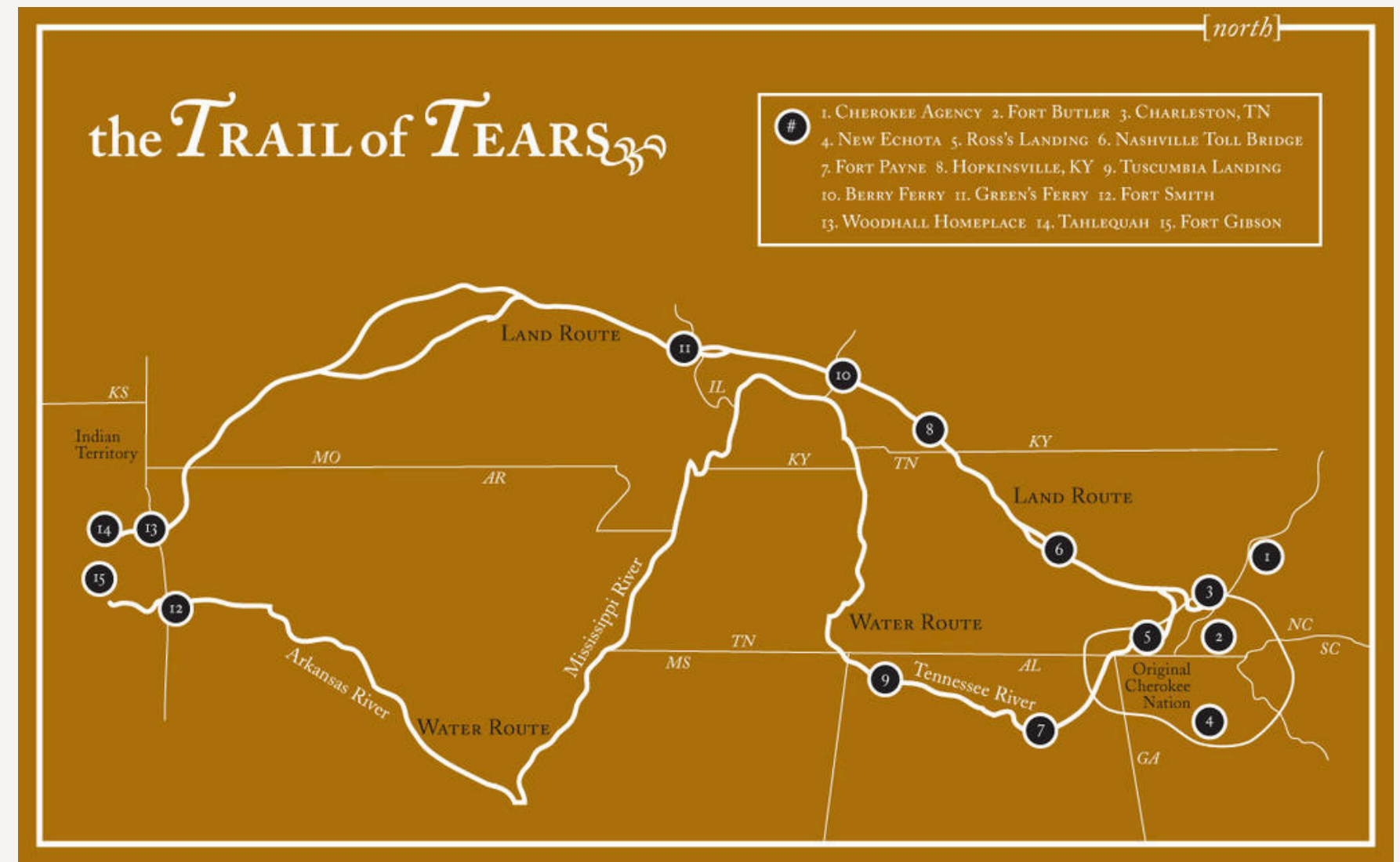
Deliberate disease exposure:

Smallpox blankets

Forced removals:

Indian Removal Act of 1830

Trail of Tears



“CAUSING SERIOUS BODILY OR MENTAL HARM TO MEMBERS OF THE GROUP”

🌐 The Dawes Act of 1887

- Established boarding schools with the goal of assimilating Native American Children
- Prohibited Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices

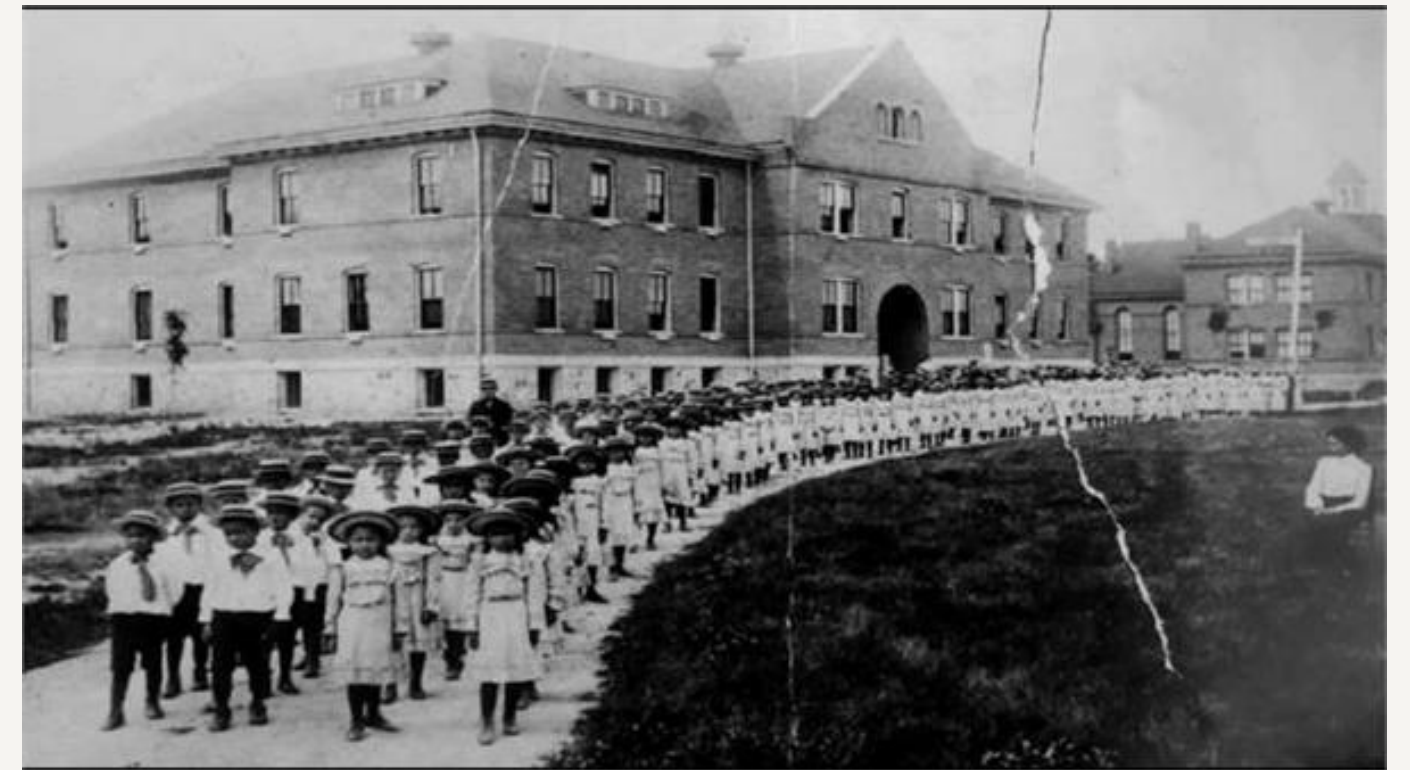
🌐 Indian Relocation Program of 1956

- Established The Indian Adoption Project
- Forced Native American to move to cities for job opportunities



“DELIBERATELY INFLECTING ON THE GROUP CONDITIONS OF LIFE CALCULATED TO BRING ABOUT ITS PHYSICAL DESTRUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART”

The U.S. government's campaign to destroy the cultural identity of Indigenous children and indoctrinate them with Christian beliefs started in 1879 and lasted into the 1990s. Over these decades, the Indian Boarding School Policy established 367 schools across the U.S.



“IMPOSING MEASURES INTENDED TO PREVENT BIRTHS WITHIN THE GROUP”

Forced sterilization was a procedure done by the Indian Health Service (IHS) physicians on Native Americans between 1973 and 1976 through coercion or without consent using a variety of tactics including cases, women were misled into believing that the procedure was reversible. In others, the sterilization was performed with adequate understanding on minors as young as 11 years old

Today, IHS requires patients to give informed consent to the operation, be 21 years or older, and not be institutionalized in a correctional or mental health facilities

“FORCIBLY TRANSFERRING CHILDREN OF THE GROUP TO ANOTHER GROUP”

The Indian Adoption Project was a federal program that removed nearly 400 Native American children from 1958 to 1967. The project placed these children from 16 Western states with white families in East and Midwest states. As a result of this practice, the Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted in 1978. This act allowed tribal governments exclusive jurisdiction over children who reside on or are domiciled on a reservation. It also gives concurrent, but presumptive jurisdiction over foster care placement proceedings for Native American children who do not live on the reservation.



HISTORICAL TRAUMA AT ALL LEVELS

Individual Level: Many negative health and mental health outcomes, loss of traditional roles

Family Level: Children try not to trigger painful memories for parents, avoid bringing up their own problems, loss of traditional parental role models and child-rearing practices, internalized messages about appropriateness of raising children in homes

Community Level: Assaults on tribal sovereignty and traditional practices, weakened social structures, losses of language, traditional practices, vision for the future

The community is now “wounded”

WOUNDED COMMUNITIES

When the whole community is wounded, it can't function in the ways it was intended:

All that is felt is the loss

People try to fill that loss with other things

Traditions are not available to help keep relationships healthy

The trauma continues to roll forward like a wave over generations

To stop this forward momentum, some form of social healing is needed where losses are mourned and replaced by something new and healthy in the community

CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES CAN ALLEVIATE THESE EFFECTS



If we want to prevent health disparities we need to focus more on stress, trauma, and poverty while providing intervention options that are grounded in traditional Indigenous knowledge




RESILIENCE

Culturally learned values and practices that promote coping mechanisms and adaptive responses to trauma



RESILIENCE

Historical traumas may have long-lasting effects on the health and mental health of individuals, family, and community but we can also understand historical traumas as potential sources of both distress and resilience

-  Identify the individual, family and community histories of survival
-  Recognize Native communities have survived a history of traumatic events, including disease, warfare, colonization, cultural genocide, poverty and spiritual banning
-  There are equally powerful stories of resistance and resilience by our Elders

PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR AI/AN PEOPLE

- Participating in cultural activities, traditions and ceremonies
- Hearing the language, songs and stories
- Interdependence, the awareness that we are all connected
- Connecting to family community and tribe
- Practicing traditional knowledge about foods, health and wellness



“I’VE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF A MAN OF AS INTEGRETY AS A LEADER OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT AND OF INDIAN PEOPLE”



The American Indian Religious Freedom Act was enacted on August 11th, 1978 with the intent to return basic civil liberties to American Indians, Alaska Native, Aleuts, and Native Hawaiians by allowing them to practice, protect and preserve their inherent

rights of freedom to believe, express and exercise their traditional rites, spiritual and cultural practices. This included access to sacred sites, the ability to worship through traditional ceremonial rites and the possession and use of objects traditional considered sacred by their cultures.

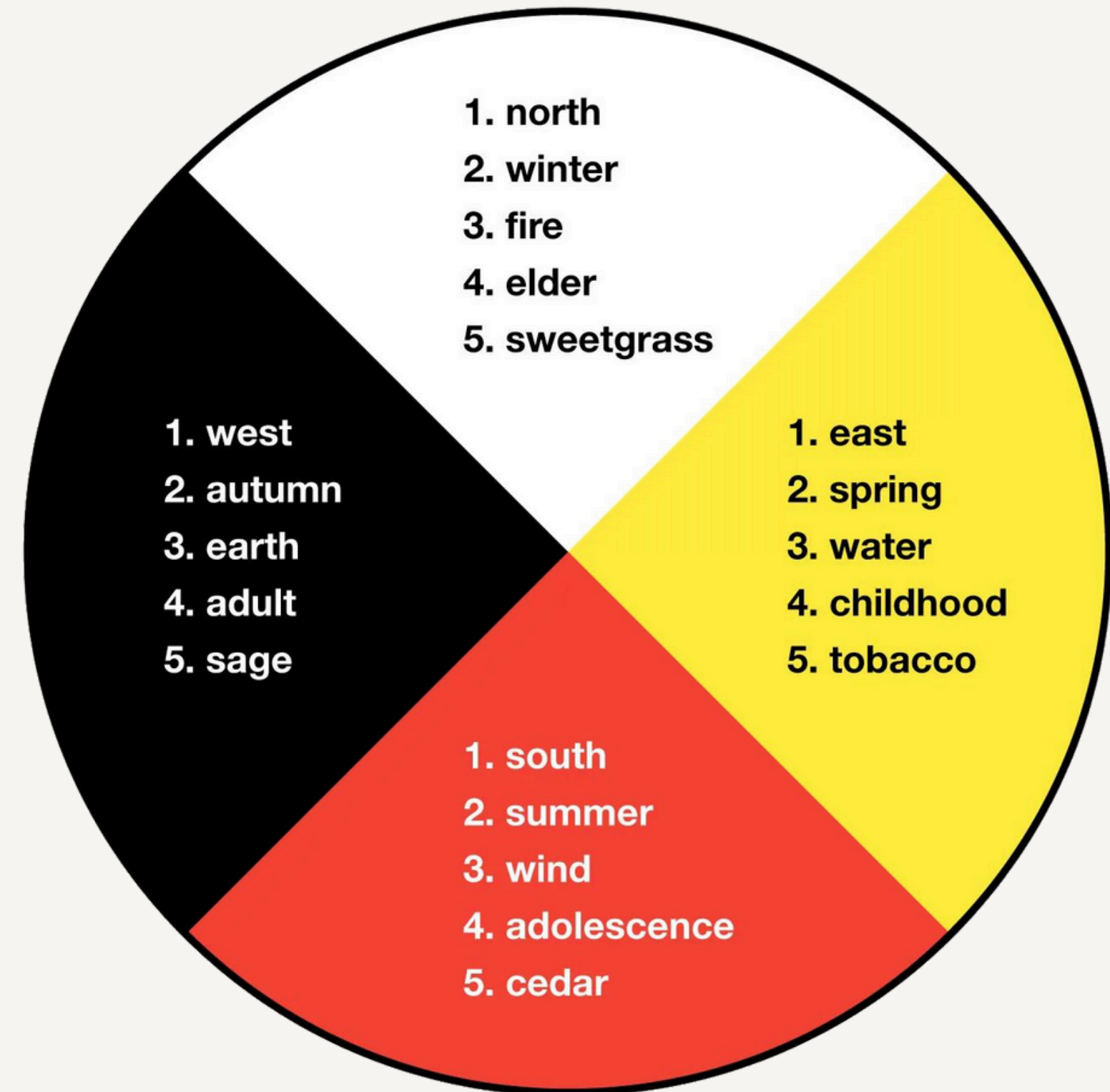
WELLNESS IS ABOUT BALANCE

Wellness involves a balance between the Creator, the natural world, and the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the self

Imbalances in any of these areas may result in individual or communal “dis- ease” or illness

Healing is a communal process of rediscovering balance within self and the harmony between self, Creator, and the natural world

THE MEDICINE WHEEL



SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

Wisdom: to live with wisdom is to acquire and use experiences as guides for making equitable and mature decisions

Love: to live our lives with love is to understand our capacity to realize, empathize and nurture the needs of others

Respect: to live with respect is to give mutual consideration for shared and differing ideas as well for the world around us

Bravery: to be brave and have courage is to recognize our moral and mental strength and to do what is appropriate

Honesty: to be honest is to recognize that we have the ability to live our lives with honor and integrity

Humility: to live with humility is to recognize that we are all equal, we all make mistakes, we all like to have our success rewarded and to put others before ourselves

Truth: to live in truth is to recognize the difference between right and wrong and to be faithful to ourselves as well as the world around us even when the right way is not the easiest way

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WELLNESS

- Whether we participate in traditional cultural forms of healing or visit a Western provider, we make a choice
- The process of identifying those things we need or seek to change, deciding to ask for help, and humbling oneself to receive healing
- Recognizing we are no more – and no less – than anyone else; we are the people
- Recognizing the spark of the Creator is in ourselves and others
- Giving thanks and giving back for what we receive

COMMUNITY IS AT THE CENTER OF WELLNESS

- Individual health cannot be separated from community wellness
- Emphasis is on extended family and community rather than individual
- Strong cultural identity is linked to resiliency
- Healing is a community process
- Value is on community welfare and the responsibility to generations before and after us
(7 Generations)

CONNECTION TO THE EARTH

- Realization the healing is connected to the land
- Knowing that our medicines come from the land and water and are sources of our healing
- Belief that we are all from the same spark of the creator
- Our wellness is connected to the wellness of our relatives - land, water, air and all life

“It is told that Creator gave the Red Man the gift of being connected to the Spirituality of Mother Earth and we are the caretakers of her.”

CULTURE AS MEDICINE

Within the context of any indigenous ceremonies, there are multiple lessons which:

Might be the focus of mental health prevention or intervention activities

Provide important teachings about community and for community members of all stages of life to create intergenerational bonds

Teaches us how to deal with loss, conflict, leadership, giving encouragement, and giving thanks

Use of Native language, traditional music, and storytelling can help awaken the healing of communities impacted by historical trauma



RESILIENT RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

- Increased bonding with family and community
- Redefined or increased sense of purpose and meaning in self
- Increased commitment to a personal mission of healing
- Connection to cultural practices

WHAT AIHFS DOES

American Indian Health and Family Services (AIHFS) is one of 41 Urban Indian Organizations (UIO) and is based in Southwest Detroit serving all Southeastern Michigan counties.

On site we can offer the following services to anyone:

Behavioral Health - Out-Patient Clinic and Psychiatric Care

Community Wellness - Youth Groups and Healthy Start

Cultural Services - Sweat Lodges and Talking Circles

Medical Clinic - Primary Care and Vaccines



AMERICAN INDIAN
Health & Family Services

AIHFS believes that the foundation of healing must occur with a balance of western medicine and traditional practices. Some of the additional cultural opportunities at AIHFS include:

Smudging/cleansing

Teachings on use of traditional medicines

Wellbriety – an SUD culturally based treatment program

Youth cultural activities

Cultural workshops for all ages

Cleansing ceremony

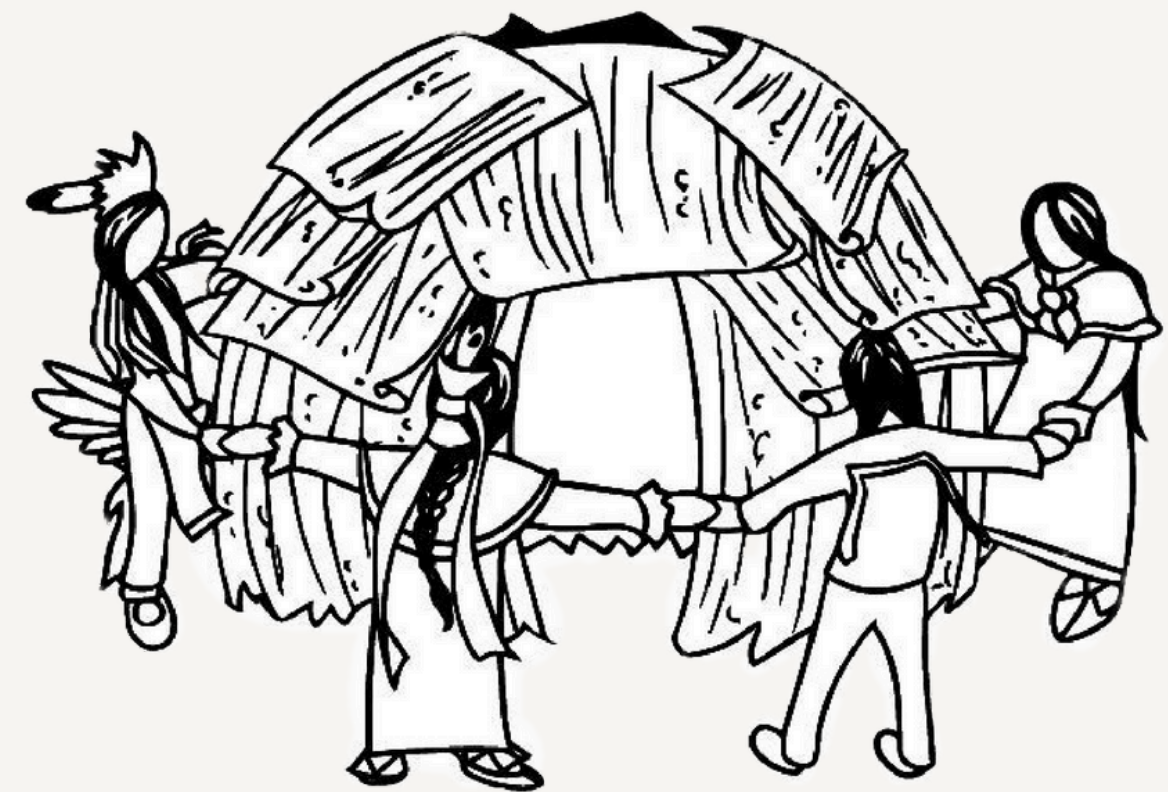
Sacred Pipe ceremony

Sweat Lodge ceremony



CULTURE BASED PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

Our **Sacred Bundle Project** has the opportunity to combine both traditional and clinical practices to create a suicide prevention program to help address AI/AN suicide rates. Using clinical screeners, community and cultural supports, and a culturally inclusive workforce, we are able to work across the state to bring prevention services to all 12 Federally Recognized tribes.



SACRED BUNDLE'S CLINICAL-BASED WORK

In conjunction with the University of Michigan's School of Social Work, the Sacred Bundle created a Hope and Wellness Screening over ten years ago. The screening combines clinical screeners, PHQ-9, DAST-10, CRAFFT, AUDIT, along with questions developed by youth that integrate community and cultural supports. The screenings are conducted privately by trained staff with a clinician on standby if intervention is needed; safety planning, a SAFE-T assessment, and immediate referrals for additional support can be made.

SACRED BUNDLE'S CULTURAL-BASED WORK

Community based cultural programming:

- Screenings available at cultural events
- Gathering of Native Americans event
- Hand drum making workshop
- Moccasin making workshop
- Youth focused sweat lodges
- Traditional medicine tending

Community cultural humility workshops:

Workshops on some best practices for working with native populations in a medical setting, historical trauma and resiliency, culturally informed prevention work, and the overall status of AI/AN mental health disparities in Michigan have all been presented by our staff

RACIAL AND ETHNIC CONCORDANCE

The importance of having someone as part of your mental health journey that looks like you, that understands your traditions, and who will be willing to connect you to a diverse care team. While we present gatekeeper training that is evidence based, having someone who looks like the youth or community sparks connection in adapting best practices. While our screeners are standardized, having someone ask these personal questions at a cultural event encourages honest dialogue about their mental health.



WHAT TO REMEMBER

We are a very diverse population of many tribes with varied levels of knowledge and experience to our culture and spiritual beliefs

Due to the attempts of genocide, many Native Americans have been assimilated into mainstream American Society

The spectrum of Native Americans integrating culture and spirituality into their lives range from active participation and awareness to no connection for generations. The desire for Native American culture and the effect of historical trauma exists within individual's DNA

THANK YOU!

———— **MIIGWETCH!**

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